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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DUBLIN 000568

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SUBJECT: THE GOI DISPUTES ITS POOR IMAGE ON SALMON  
DRIFT-NET FISHING

REF: BALTON-YOUNG E-MAIL OF MARCH 2

Classified By: Political-Economic Counselor Mary E. Daly; Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

1. (C) Summary: In April, the GOI announced a salmon drift-net quota that exceeded local scientists, recommendations, prompting protests from the media, opposition parties, and the North Atlantic Salmon Fund (NASF, an international NGO coalition). In discussing the GOI's "side of the story" with Post, fishery officials noted that the domestic salmon industry was tightly regulated and that Irish drift nets were not harming other Member States, salmon stocks. Moreover, Ireland would align salmon quotas with scientific recommendations in 2007, as it could not do so now because of the economic burden it would place on fishermen. The officials added that the GOI was less focused on NASF criticism than on the possibility of Commission intervention in Member States' salmon industries. GOI delays in aligning salmon quotas with scientific advice will give commercial fishermen more time to reduce their salmon catch, an approach that fits the governing party's efforts to court labor in the run-up to the 2007 national elections. End summary.

Background: Criticism on Drift-netting  
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2. (U) Every year, the GOI sets a Total Allowable Catch (TAC) for salmon and typically allocates 70 percent of this national quota to roughly 850 licensed commercial drift-net operations, located mainly on the west coast. On April 22, Minister of the Marine Pat Gallagher (a sub-Cabinet post) announced that the 2005 TAC would be 139,900 salmon, or 42,000 above the number recommended by scientists in the National Salmon Commission, a government body. Gallagher acknowledged the discrepancy, but noted that the scientists' recommended catch would have put economic burdens on Ireland's 1,500 drift-net fishermen. He pledged to align the TAC fully with scientific advice by 2007.

3. (U) Gallagher's statement prompted public criticism from several quarters. Opposition parties and leading newspapers described the TAC as irresponsible, while angler associations and environmental groups expressed concerns about the possible extinction of Ireland's wild salmon stocks. In an Irish Times op-ed, Orri Vigfusson, Chairman of the North Atlantic Salmon Fund (NASF, an international NGO coalition), faulted the GOI for breaking earlier pledges to align the TAC with scientific advice by 2005. He also claimed that stakeholders in France, Spain, Germany, and the UK, were "furious" at losing salmon stocks to Ireland's drift nets.

The GOI: "Criticism Is Unfair"  
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5. (C) Post sought GOI reaction to the criticism and its general views on the salmon issue in a May 3 discussion with Frank Sheridan and George O'Doherty, the Principal and Deputy Principal, respectively, in the Fisheries Division of the Department of Communications, the Marine and Natural Resources. Both officials said that the criticism was undeserved, since the GOI spent euro 30 million annually to regulate the salmon industry on the basis of a scientific monitoring system that "was unequaled in Europe." The system included 22 infrared-technology fish counters in Ireland's main salmon spawning rivers and a micro-chip tagging scheme for 300,000 salmonids restocked annually. Based on scientific advice, the GOI has taken steps to reduce over-exploitation of salmon stocks, such as: decreasing the TAC yearly since 2001; reducing the fishing area at sea from 12 to 6 nautical miles; and, restricting the drift-net season to June and July. These efforts have yielded a 36-percent cut in the salmon catch since 2001.

6. (C) Sheridan and O'Doherty objected to efforts by the NASF and Vigfusson to portray Ireland as the principal obstacle to international salmon conservation efforts. For example, Vigfusson had described Ireland as the last European country to use drift nets, though drift-net operations, albeit on a smaller scale, continued in Norway, Spain, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and other parts of the UK. The GOI also disagreed with the NASF on several other fronts:

A) Scientific Advice. The GOI had not fulfilled its promise to align the TAC with scientific advice by 2005, but the reason centered on changes in calculation methods used by National Salmon Commission scientists. This year, the scientists recommended a TAC of 97,000 to achieve a 75 percent probability that salmon in Ireland would have adequate spawning numbers to ensure conservation. If the scientists had, as in past years, calculated on the basis of reaching a 50 percent probability of adequate spawning, the 2005 TAC would already be in line with scientific advice.

B) Regional Impact. Scientific monitoring had yielded no evidence that Irish drift-netting had appreciably harmed salmon stocks in other EU Member States. To date, no EU Member State had demarched the GOI to express concern about Ireland's fishing practices. Sheridan ventured that the adverse effects of industrialization on fresh water conditions in France and Spain accounted principally for diminished salmon stocks in those countries. Notably, the seven Irish fishery regions identified by Vigfusson as having dangerously low stocks were located on the east coast, where industrialization was heaviest, but where drift-netting was light. (Note: The French Embassy is planning a reception on May 25 that would focus on salmon issues and include participation from Post, the GOI, Vigfusson, and the Canadian and Spanish embassies.)

C) Buy-outs. O'Doherty said that Vigfusson had targeted Ireland for criticism because the GOI had refused to adopt his preferred approach to salmon conservation: drift-net buy-outs. After consultations with commercial fisherman, the GOI had found that buy-outs were attractive only to small-time drift-netters. The fishermen who accounted for the lion's share of salmon hauls were uninterested. The GOI thus preferred to pursue salmon conservation through strictly enforced quotas.

#### Concern about Commission Intervention

17. (C) The GOI was less focused on NASF criticism than on the possibility of Commission intervention in the salmon industry, said the officials. In the past, the Commission had taken the view that the management of wild salmon, as a home-water fishery, was primarily a matter for Member States, governments. Currently, however, the Commission was preparing a report, with Irish cooperation, on the effects of interceptory salmon fishing on Member States, which might recommend options for intervention to ensure the conservation of salmon stocks. The GOI was also awaiting the Commission's reply to Irish submissions regarding a complaint by UK parties that Irish drift-netting violated the EU Habitats Directive.

18. (U) Emboff noted strong USG interest in international efforts to restore wild salmon stocks and cited successful cooperative initiatives with the NASF to increase the number of salmon returning to New England streams. Emboff also observed that the USG had assisted in funding the retirement of commercial salmon hauls in the North Atlantic and would encourage the GOI to support global conservation measures.

#### Comment: Courting Labor

19. (C) Post is not in a position to judge the scientific merits of the Irish officials' observations; our aim was mainly to pass along the GOI's "side of the story." We would note, however, that the campaign for the 2007 national elections is already underway, and it is probably no coincidence that Minister Gallagher will wait two years before aligning the TAC with scientific advice. The delay appears to fit an emerging pattern in which major government decisions affecting labor have been put off, such as with privatization initiatives in the air transportation, health, and energy sectors. Prime Minister Ahern, who half-jokingly describes himself as a "socialist," is courting labor heavily to shore up the support base for the governing Fianna Fail party. Minister Gallagher's actions to provide a longer, softer landing for western fishermen on salmon quotas would seem to be in line with that approach.

KENNY